

Rolland Apartments
216 Second Avenue North
Great Falls
Cascade County
Montana

HABS No. MT-74

HABS
MONT,
7-GREFA,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ROLLAND APARTMENT HOUSE

HABS No. MT-74

Location: 216 2nd Avenue North
Assessor's Block 310,
The east 4.91 feet of Lot 4 and
all of Lot 5, Great Falls, Montana

Present Owner: Heirs and Devisees of Ruth Kelly, deceased

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of
Significance: The Rolland Apartment House is a significant cultural
resource as it possesses historical feeling due to
design, materials and workmanship, as a contributing
structure to the potential downtown Great Falls
historic district and for its association with T.J.
Kelly, a prominent Great Falls businessman.

HABS
MONT,
7-GREFA,
3-

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection: 6 June 1916

Architect: unknown

Historical Narrative:

The Rolland Apartments were built in 1916 for T.J. Kelly. It was named for his mother-in-law, Mrs. Katherine Rolland (1824-1925). Mrs. Rolland (pronounced "raw-land") lived to the age of 101. She was reputed to be the oldest woman in Cascade County to vote when women obtained the vote in 1916.

The Rolland Apartment House has served as apartments and hotel rooms throughout the life of the building. The building contains twelve apartments and twelve hotel rooms. It was vacated in the fall of 1987.

Biographical Information: T.J. Kelly

Thomas Joseph Kelly (1844-1922) was a coal miner from Scranton, Pennsylvania. He was a civil war veteran having served with Union forces. Kelly came to Montana in 1889 on the way to the Alaska gold fields.

He was known as "Popcorn" Kelly for the popcorn wagon he ran on Central Avenue in Great Falls. Profit from this business financed construction of the Rolland Apartments and other property in Great Falls.

Kelly married Bridgette Rolland (1847-1936) in the 1880's. They had three children: Raymond, Loretta, and Gertrude.

Raymond Kelly married Ruth Bartch in 1920. They had three children. Thomas Joseph, John Rolland, and Mary Ellen. Raymond operated an automobile garage near the Liberty Theatre. Ruth ran the Rolland Apartment House. Their daughter, Mary Ellen became manager of the building where she lived for fifty-six years. She moved in when she was four years old and retired as manager in 1986. She now lives in a house across the street from the Rolland Apartment House.

The Rolland Apartment House was supposed to be four stories tall; however, in a dispute with a neighbor, a spite wall was constructed and the building was stopped at two stories. The window wells on the east side of the building were specially constructed so tenants would receive some sunlight. The Woodworth Apartments were directly to the east of the Rolland Apartment House, and Mr. Woodworth, owner of the Woodworth Apartments did not appreciate Kelly building his apartments directly on the property line, so he constructed a wall on his side of the line. The Woodworth Apartments and the spite wall burned down about 1978.

Distinguished visitors to the Rolland included Robert Crawford in 1945 or 1946. He was a songwriter noted for the Air Corps song, "Off we go into the wild blue yonder." Another visitor was the painter Alex LaFontaine, although he was not well-known in his lifetime. Common guests were railroad, and city and county employees due to the proximity of the Great Northern Railroad and Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad depots. City and county offices were also within a few blocks. The Rolland Apartment House was full in later years due to business with the welfare office.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Information

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Rolland Apartment House is of architectural merit based on the integrity of the facade.
2. Condition of Fabric: Good (to be demolished)
3. Summary Description: The Rolland Apartment House is a two-story rectangular apartment building, with a basement. Its design and materials are characteristic of multi-residential structures built during the first part of the twentieth century.

B. Detailed Description of Exterior

1. Foundation: The foundation is cut stone covered by cement. It was built to hold a load of four stories.

2. **Wall Construction:** The exterior walls are brick. The side walls are common bond while the facade is a lighter brick veneer. There are polychrome designs on the front face and white terra-cotta decoration along the frieze. White terra-cotta coping covers the front parapet and red curved terra-cotta tiles form the coping ridge of the side and rear parapets. The frieze area features terra-cotta belt courses and raised geometric panels. The east side has two recessed bays, for light wells with windows on each of the three walls within those bays. The wooden wall on the south side was constructed after the adjoining building (the Opera Hotel also built and owned by Kelly) was torn down by order of the City of Great Falls. Soldier belt courses at the water table, header belt courses at the base of the structure, and verticle piers are of polychrome brick.
3. **Structural Systems:** Exterior walls are brick while interior supports are probably iron or steel frame.
4. **Porches, Stoops, Etc.:** Not applicable
5. **Openings, Doorways, and Windows:** Windows are one-over-one, three-over-one, and two-over-one double hung. Window sills and lintels of brick are polychrome. A wooden overdoor with brackets is centered over the double, full-light, glass entry with double-light transom. Window openings along the east wall are covered with corrugated fiberglass installed when the Rolland closed in 1988.
6. **Roof - Shape and Covering:** The roof is flat and covered with composition asphalt roofing.

C. Detailed Description of Interior

1. **Floor Plans:** There is no entrance lobby. The front door opens on a straight hallway extending directly south into the building. A dozen rooms face the hallway; the apartments are generally on the left and hotel rooms on the right. The same floor plan exists upstairs. The apartments were remodeled about 1963. They reflect the plain unornamented furnishings common to the 1960's. The hotel rooms, on the other hand, still have the trundle beds and fir trim of the original construction period. The basement housed storage space for roomers and a coal-fired boiler with coal bins. It has been replaced with a natural gas boiler. The coal fired boiler was made for the Rolland Apartment House at the Great Falls Iron Works.
2. **Stairways:** The main stairway leads up to the second floor from just south of the front entrance. It is of clean and simple lines and made of oak. An enclosed stairway is located in the southwest corner of the building.

3. Flooring: The flooring is fir strips about one and a half inches wide. It has been covered with carpet throughout.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finishes: The walls and ceilings are all of lath and plaster composition.
5. Doorways, Doors, and Windows: Transom windows exist over many of the doors. None of them are operable.
6. Interior Trim: Fir trim is used on portions of the building not remodeled.
7. Hardware: The hotel rooms have trundle beds in varying stages of decay.
8. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment: The building uses radiated steam heat. It has modern electrical lights and modern plumbing in the apartments. The fixtures appear to be vintage in the hotel rooms.

D. Site and Surroundings

1. Orientation and General Setting: The Rolland Apartment House faces north on Second Avenue, with parking lots to the east and west. Southeast is the Sparling Hotel. South is the Great Falls Main Post Office. Residential houses are across the street to the north.

PART III. SOURCES OF PROJECT INFORMATION

Plans call for the demolition of the Rolland Apartment House in 1989. The historical documentation of the Rolland Apartment House was completed by Gar C. Wood & Associates, Inc., in July 1988. It is one portion of the historical/architectural recordation of the Rolland Apartment House prepared for the U.S. Postal Service that also includes photodocumentation. The recordation conforms with the standards of the Historic American Buildings Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior.

Bibliography:

Page, Werner and Partners

1984 Historical and Architectural Survey of a Selected area within the Great Falls Revitalization District.
Great Falls, Montana.

Kelly, Mary Ellen

1988 Personal communication. Interview with G.C. Wood on 18 July 1988.